

Food Safety and
Inspection Service

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The Beacon

PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH FOOD SAFETY

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Dr. Erin Howey (OPHS), in the Pathology section of the Eastern Laboratory in Athens, Ga., views a slide prepared from tissue sent to the lab. Photo taken by Jeffrey White (OED).

When opportunities to educate consumers about FSIS and food safety arise, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured: far right) is ready. On Sept. 10, Mr. Kiecker visited Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 1503 Dale City during their bingo night and handed out food safety education bags and materials to members. Mr. Kiecker and his wife regularly volunteer at VFW Post 1503.

The VFW is the largest and oldest war veterans service organization with a long and proven history of providing vital assistance and support to America's service members, veterans and their families.

Office of Food Safety Hosts First Women's Equality Day Town Hall for FSIS

By Felicia Thompson
Phone: (202) 603-2150

The Office of Food Safety (OFS) hosted a virtual Women's Equality Day Town Hall for FSIS employees commemorating the 100th anniversary of the official proclamation of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. This amendment prohibits states and the federal government from denying the right to vote to citizens of the United States based on sex.

The proclamation date of August 26 has been designated as Women's Equality Day: a day to remember the persistence of the many women who fought to ensure women's equal right to vote in the U.S. Constitution and for the broader principle of equality under the law for all.

Brief History of Women's Equality Day

Tisha Lighty-Cain, an Office of Field Operations (OFO) consumer safety inspector in the Philadelphia District and an FSIS Women's Special Emphasis

Program manager, opened the event by discussing the history and significance of Women's Equality Day. Said Lighty-Cain, "The 19th Amendment resulted from the initial efforts and activities that occurred in the early 1800s. The need for altering social conditions for women, combined with the idea of equality, led to the birth of the Women's Suffrage movement. At that time, women made half or less than half of their male counterparts, they could not inherit property or vote, and were denied many political rights."

She went on to describe how activists — such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell and many others — began making demands for equal rights. "Strong, conscientious, forward-thinking female leaders fought a long and hard battle to pave the way for the 19th Amendment."

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Share Your FSIS Stories and Snapshots!

Send articles and photos to Beacon@usda.gov. Articles must be original works that have been cleared by your supervisor and contain the author's name and contact information. Submissions should not exceed 250 words. The Beacon editorial staff will edit submissions for content and length.

High-resolution photos must be submitted as a separate attachment in .jpg format. Provide a media release form for photos of individuals under 18 years of age.



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The Beacon Mission Statement

The Beacon newsletter is prepared by the Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education to provide relevant mission critical information to all FSIS employees.

The Beacon provides employees information about the Agency's proposed regulations, policies and programs; training opportunities; and important employee welfare initiatives to connect employees to the mission and build a cohesive community.

The Beacon enables employees to stay up-to-date with the latest events and see the Agency's mission executed in action.

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Deadline for submissions is the first day of the previous month.

- Nov. issue – due Oct. 1
- Dec. issue – due Nov. 1
- Jan. issue – due Dec. 1
- Feb. issue – due Jan. 1

Articles will be considered for publication in the order in which they are received. If your article is time sensitive, please indicate that in the subject line of your submission email. Due to the number of submissions received each month and the limited amount of space, we unfortunately cannot guarantee that your submission will be used.

The FSIS Management Council

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- *acting

Town Hall Round-Up

FSIS employee Town Halls are live phone conferences hosted by Agency leadership the fourth Wednesday of the month at 9 a.m., 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. Eastern Time. The Beacon will bring you highlights of the previous month's town hall. The next meetings is October 28. See page 8 for details.

August 26 Town Hall Highlights

Annual Leave Restoration

The Office of Personnel Management issued a new rule entitling employees whose work has been deemed "essential" to have excess annual leave restored without scheduling leave and having it denied. This applies to the current COVID-19 pandemic and future emergencies.

Egg Products Inspection Regulations Final Rule

FSIS would soon publish the rule, under which federally inspected egg product establishments would be required to develop and implement Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point systems and Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures to ensure that pathogens cannot be detected in finished egg products.

Questions from FSISFeedback@usda.gov

Question from an investigator in the Philadelphia District: "I have heard of physicians telling patients with COVID-19 that they can return to work after 72 hours fever free. What if they never had a fever? Shouldn't we require all employees coming back to work after a COVID-19 diagnosis to be tested again and have that test be negative?"

Response from Capt. Kis Robertson Hale, Deputy Administrator for the Office of Public Health Science and Chief Public Health Veterinarian: "When it comes to decisions like these, FSIS will continue to look to our federal partners at the CDC. They have the expertise in making public health recommendations to control diseases like COVID-19 and have been continually developing and updating guidance for situations like this. The most current recommendations from CDC for persons who test positive but never develop symptoms are to discontinue isolation 10 days after the date of their first positive test. CDC is no longer recommending testing to determine when to end isolation.

Question: "Even though the [face] shield and holder are only a few ounces in weight, that additional weight toward the front of the hardhat increases neck strain."

Response from Frank Mays, Assistant Administrator for the Office of Management: "We recognize that face shields might pose some inconveniences and require a period of adjustment. But they are necessary to provide in-plant personnel with the most protection possible during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Agency has in stock two different models of face shields: (1) ERB Safety Face Shields, FSIS-90, with carrier/adaptor, FSIS-90A, and (2) a new model, the Bullard Face Shield, FSIS-96, with brackets, FSIS-96-A. Employees should feel comfortable

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Under Secretary's Column

This summer, I traveled to district offices and establishments across the country to meet with FSIS employees in the field. I have truly been moved by many of their stories and career journeys, about how they are striving for their personal goals and about the professional relationships they have forged. When I outlined my vision for 2020 earlier this year, I noted the importance of building relationships. I believe that every successful organization is built on a foundation of strong internal and external relationships. I've had a chance to observe — and to build — more of these relationships and to see the results of personal investment.



Dr. Mindy Brashears

I met hardworking employees who shared stories about how they pursued additional training and education while working for the Agency. Many have then gone on to take advantage of the opportunities for advancement within FSIS and have moved up through field positions as they acquire additional knowledge and skills. Their stories show how FSIS can be a great place to build a career and the many paths that you can take toward new positions with responsibilities and job titles you might not have even thought possible.

I am also inspired by stories of dedicated and engaged employees who are still eager to come to work, even when faced with personal hardship or a medical challenge. These employees are supported by their coworkers, who are quick to cover shifts, donate leave and find other ways to support each other. These stories demonstrate the strong working relationships that exist in FSIS and how our employees care for one another.

I am continually impressed by the amazing and generous people that work for this Agency, and we are a stronger organization because of you and the relationships that you have built. I hope each of you recognize the importance of the work that you do in contributing to our food safety mission and saving lives. Secretary Sonny Perdue likes to emphasize that we are all part of one USDA family, and I'm proud of the way FSIS employees live that out every day.

Administrator's Column

Last month, I traveled to many establishments in Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota to visit with inspection personnel. I was reminded of the diverse environments where FSIS employees carry out our food safety mission — from buffalo, hog and poultry slaughter establishments to egg breaking facilities and warehouses conducting export and ID services. Each work location brings unique challenges to practicing the safety measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for preventing the spread of COVID-19. It's important that you implement the recommendations as practically as possible for your unique circumstance. This might mean you need to lift your face shield to be able to see to safely walk down stairs. We want you to do the best you can to protect yourself and those around you from COVID-19 in the most reasonable way possible.



Paul Kiecker

Meeting with supervisors and employees in the establishments, I also noticed the impact our attitude has on how we cope with all the changes occurring. It's important to remember that our attitude affects not only ourselves, but those around us and our work environment. A positive attitude and open-minded approach can contribute to an entire team's success.

I also want to continue to emphasize the importance of communication. We have completed the rollout of electronic devices (e-Devices) to the Alameda, Atlanta, Dallas, Jackson, Raleigh and Springdale districts. As each employee receives their e-Device, we expect that you will use them to help stay up to date on the latest information from the Agency. The *Wednesday Newslines*, *The Beacon* and employee town hall meetings are all important sources of information about the resources and benefits that are available to you. Staying engaged and aware of this information will also help ensure you don't miss important opportunities or deadlines. Until I can make a trip to your establishment or office for an in-person visit, please continue to send us your questions and suggestions to FSISFeedback@usda.gov.

FSIS Deputy Administrator Terri Nintemann and OFS Under Secretary Dr. Mindy Brashears followed Lighty-Cain and shared their professional journeys, and then responded to employee questions that had been submitted to the Under Secretary's email box, AskFSUS@usda.gov.

Nintemann: Change, Teamwork and Mentoring

Deputy Administrator Nintemann joined FSIS in 2003, having previously worked for a Senate committee and individual members of the Senate and House of Representatives. In the time Nintemann has been with FSIS, she worked in multiple program areas and observed significant changes over the years. During the event she recalled, "As a young woman right out of college, I quickly learned the importance of teamwork and being able to work across the aisle and across program areas. Teamwork requires more than just reaching consensus on a problem — it requires careful management of relationships and networks. I learned early on that women need to support one another within these networks."

Women can face a variety of obstacles during their professional careers, such as being underestimated due to gender, age or background. Nintemann experienced some of these hinderances herself and found ways to overcome them. She said, "For me, these experiences drove me to work harder — to be more prepared and better informed — until I was confident that I was doing the best job possible. I leaned on more experienced female colleagues, who offered mentorship and guidance, as I also watched them navigate difficult situations."

Nintemann noted that the Agency has made strides in diversifying its leadership and welcoming the contributions of women at all levels. "The percentage of Senior Executive Service positions at FSIS held by women is close to 50 percent. Seven of the ten FSIS program areas or offices are now led by women. In 2010, 4.5 percent of female employees were supervisors compared to 10 percent of male employees. Today, 6 percent of FSIS female employees are supervisors, compared to 8 percent of FSIS male employees," she said. "These numbers are a testament to the valuable contributions of women at FSIS. It's important that as an agency we continue to recognize women's achievements and make sure that our systems are promoting and rewarding them appropriately."

Brashears: Networking, Communicating and Resources

OFS Under Secretary Dr. Brashears followed. "As a female scientist who has spent her career in academia, and now in the federal government, these issues are very personal to me. Although I've always had a vested interest in agriculture and science, I didn't always have another woman to help nurture my interests or help me navigate my way in the workplace."

Her first position after college was as an extension food safety specialist and assistant professor in the University of Nebraska's Department of Food Science. She later became a professor of food

science at Texas Tech and within 12 years, was named the director of the International Center for Food Industry Excellence.

In her roles at Texas Tech, Dr. Brashears says she "had the opportunity to teach tomorrow's scientists and food safety advocates about food microbiology and food safety, and to mentor them over the years as they succeeded in their own careers. It feels good knowing that I had some part in helping them, but especially the women, to get there."

Committed to engaging, supporting and recognizing women at FSIS and their contributions to food safety, Dr. Brashears believes that women who join the FSIS workforce should have access to the support, mentorship and opportunities that will help them to strive.

"Women make up just under half - 47 percent - of the FSIS workforce, and this number has remained steady over the past three years. We've had success in the recent past recruiting women into positions within the workforce as food inspectors, consumer safety inspectors and public health veterinarians. Yet for many of these positions, women still make up a smaller percentage of FSIS' personnel than in comparable civilian positions across the country," said Dr. Brashears.

To find solutions to the unique demands placed on women, both at home and in the workplace, AskFSUS@usda.gov is available for all employees to communicate directly with Dr. Brashears about the challenges and concerns women are experiencing. Dr. Brashears stated, "I'm committed to working toward solutions to these issues, and I want employees to feel engaged in their work — to see how their daily contributions impact the Agency's mission — and to feel empowered to bring concerns forward and work through problems." Dr. Brashears concluded, "Women in science, agriculture and public health represent a growing community that will only expand as we continue to support one another and strengthen our skills, especially at FSIS."

Following Dr. Brashears' talk, she teamed up with Deputy Administrator Nintemann; Dr. Maria Esteras, Veterinary Recruiting and Outreach Coordinator in OFO; Jodi Hallstrom, an FSIS Employee Assistance Program manager in the Office of Management (OM); and three female members of the FSIS Management Council to respond to employees' questions that had been submitted to the Under Secretary's mailbox. The Management Council members who participated were the OM Deputy Assistant Administrator (AA) C. Natalie Lui Duncan, an OFO Executive Associate for Regulatory Operations Geraldine "Gerri" French, and Office of Employee Experience and Development's AA Dr. Soumaya Tohamy.

The topics included paid parental leave, women in positions of authority, training to combat sexism, restrooms and access to lactation facilities in the field, safety in the workplace, sexual harassment, pay gaps, and promotions for women of color.

Continued on page 5...

SNAPSHOTS FROM

Souderton, Penn.

During their lunch break, inspection personnel at Est. M-1311, a beef slaughter and processing plant in Souderton, Pennsylvania, gather for a photo with Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears, Administrator Paul Kiecker and OFO Executive Associate for Regulatory Operations Geraldine French.



Pictured, front row, seated from left: Tina Anderson and Dr. Brashears. Pictured, second row, standing from left: Frank Tang, Timothy Arace, Ashlyn Parise, Tracee Arace and Susan Hoover. Pictured, back row, from left: Kiecker, French, Dr. Robert Munson, Dorothy Woods, Derek Turner, Agim Dogani, Philip McMahon and Walter Rorrer. Photo by Amie Pena, OFO.



Marshall, Minn.

On August 11, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, left) and Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, right) visit Establishment (Est.) P-7669, a turkey slaughter plant in Marshall, Minnesota, and meet Consumer Safety Inspector Watashee Marlow (pictured, center). By wearing face coverings, the trio is adhering to one of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines and FSIS requirements to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Photo by Dr. Mark Johnson, OFO.

THE FIELD



Hatfield, Penn.

FSIS inspectors at Est. M-791, an export, meat slaughter/processing and poultry processing plant in Hatfield, Pennsylvania, with Dr. Brashears (pictured, first row, from left), OFO Executive Associate for Regulatory Operations Geraldine French and Kiecker (pictured, back row, center) gather with their protective gear, available to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Pictured, front row, from left: Dr. Brashears, French and Gary Hagenbuch. Pictured, back row, from left: Michael Levett, Daryl Peachey, David Yoder and Kiecker. Photo courtesy of OFO.



Pictured, from left: Frontline Supervisor Amie Pena, Kiecker, Dr. Brashears, Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Safwat Gayed and French gathered with another group of inspection staff who are assigned at Est. 791 in Hatfield, Pennsylvania. Photo by Daryl Peachey, OFO.



After visiting Establishment G-21597, an egg processing plant near Esterville, Iowa, FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, left) and Frontline Supervisor Dr. Jeffrey Enlow (pictured, back) visit Inspector Kevin Zitterich's (pictured, right) home to see his "pet cow."

Photo courtesy of Paul Kiecker, OA.